

# Epworth

## Children's Home

### Parent/Guardian Handbook



Living **CARE**. Transforming Lives.

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## Epworth Children's Home – Parent/Guardian Handbook

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Mission Statement

The mission of Epworth Children's Home

### Vision Statement

The vision of Epworth Children's Home is to provide superior services for the greatest number of individuals through competent, caring adults who are trained in the most effective, research based methods of child and family care.

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of Epworth Children's Home is to break the destructive cycle of abuse, neglect and shame and replace it with an opportunity for each child to live a life of self-respect, responsibility and productivity.

## ***Introduction***

Epworth Children's Home was established in 1895 by the Methodist Church in South Carolina to serve children, youth, and families throughout the state. As set forth in the Mission Statement, Epworth provides a Christian environment for children who cannot live with their families until current problems are solved, or until the young person begins his or her own life as an adult.

Sometimes the South Carolina Department of Social Services asks Epworth to help. At other times, families themselves ask for assistance. In either case, Epworth is here to meet the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the child while we also assist in the relationship between the child and family.

While the child is at Epworth, he or she will live in a building we call a "cottage" with other children of the same sex and of similar age. The cottage group will be supervised at all times. During times of high activity, or in times of emergency, additional adults will be available. Epworth provides specific training to equip staff to work effectively in this environment.

The child and family will also work with a Case Manager and Cottage Coordinator. The Case Manager is the staff member who, together with the family and child, develops the plan of care. The Case Manager also coordinates social services for the family. The Cottage Coordinator supervises cottage life and those staff within the cottage who work with the child on day-to-day living activities. Either the Case Manager or Cottage Coordinator can make visitation arrangements with the family.

It is the desire of the staff of Epworth Children's Home that your child's stay will be as pleasant as possible for everyone involved. It is, however, important to remember that growth and change are not always easy or pleasant. Our goal is to assist you and your family in making changes which will positively affect you in the future. As a member of the placement team your participation is vital to the success of your child's placement. We ask for your understanding and cooperation as we work together to help your child become all that he/she is capable of being.

## ***Epworth Children's Home Policy and Procedures for Intake/Admissions***

### **Policy**

The Intake/Admissions Department of Epworth Children's Home shall be responsible for gathering comprehensive data on each referral or potential placement in order to ensure that each child is appropriately placed into an environment in which her/his spiritual, emotional, physical, and educational needs are adequately met.

(Intake Policy Revised and Adopted by the Board of Trustees on 11/17/05.)

### **Overview**

Epworth provides standard residential group care for children and youth in grades K-12. There are many different reasons that families may seek our services. Some of these reasons may include the death of a parent or both parents, separation or divorce, financial crisis or the physical inability to care for a child. Other families may be experiencing chemical dependency or abuse issues. The parent or guardian may be dealing with serious health problems or advancing age. Epworth also serves children and youth that may be in the custody of the State of South Carolina due to abuse, abandonment, or neglect. Our program is therefore designed to meet the needs of children and youth who may have mild behavior and/or adjustment issues as a consequence of their life situation. Whatever the issues that lead to placement, Epworth seeks to minister to children, youth and families, through a caring, accepting, safe, Christian community.

Epworth is not staffed to provide psychiatric or residential treatment services. Epworth's standard residential group care in cottages is not designed for children or youth whose behavioral and emotional problems require an intensive clinical or secured/locked setting.

Epworth provides standard residential care for all qualified children, youth, and families throughout South Carolina. All referrals and inquiries are handled on an individual basis regardless of race, gender ethnicity, or religious affiliation of the applicants. Epworth requires active involvement on the part of the parent or legal guardian in the admission process and throughout the duration of the placement.

All applicants not accepted for admission will be provided with alternative referrals for services provided by other agencies. Such referrals are coordinated through the office of the Coordinator of Intake Services.

### **Procedures**

1. The initial inquiry regarding placement or services is received by the Coordinator of Intake Services.
2. The Coordinator will conduct a screening interview either over the phone or face to face. During this screening, information is gathered about why placement or services are needed. If a face to face interview is conducted, a campus tour is also provided. If it becomes clear during the screening that the child does not meet the criteria for admission, the referring person is informed of this without delay and directed to a more appropriate program or agency. If the child does appear to meet the criteria for admission, the referring person is sent an application packet by mail, via the agency's website, or in person.
3. Once the application is returned to the Intake/Admissions Department, it is reviewed to make sure all requested records and information is included. A file for the prospective client is then created which contains the application, and all records received.

4. The Coordinator of Intake Services consults with the Administrative Review Committee to reach consensus about placement. The family or legal guardian is then notified of the Committee's decision whether placement, other Epworth services, or referral to more appropriate settings.
5. On the day of admission, the new resident(s) and guardian(s) meet with the Coordinator of Intake to complete the admission process and begin orientation to the campus and cottage life.

#### **Administrative Review Committee**

President

Chief Program Officer

Coordinator of Intake Services

Chief Academic Officer

Coordinator of Social Services

Coordinator of Residential Services

Also invited to attend as needed: Health Center staff, Minister of Higher Education, Pastor, residential staff, etc.

## ***Policy and Procedures for Discharging Residents from Epworth Children's Home***

### **Policy for Discharge**

Consistent with the mission of Epworth Children's Home, the Epworth staff will make every effort to provide an orderly and supervised environment to promote a successful placement for each child and attainment of the placement goals. A child's placement may end for the following reasons:

- a) The custodian decides to discharge the child; or
- b) Epworth Children's Home, as service provider, decides to terminate its services; or
- c) Both the guardian and Epworth determine that the goals and purpose of the placement have been achieved.

The decision making process shall involve the President and an interdisciplinary team of Epworth staff and, when possible, the guardian. The President or his/her designee shall approve any discharge where Epworth is terminating its services. The Epworth staff may provide post-discharge services only with the approval of the President.

(Revised and Adopted by Epworth Children's Home Board of Trustees on 11/17/05.)

### **Procedures for Discharge**

1. When possible, the decision to discharge will be made by an interdisciplinary team of Epworth directors/staff (administrative, pastoral, social services, health, education, direct care, etc.). The decision makers are to make a careful evaluation to assess when a placement has reached its goals or if Epworth services should be terminated.
2. The Epworth staff, when possible, are to provide ample notice to the child and the guardian prior to discharge to allow an appropriate alternate placement to be arranged if needed.
3. The discharge forms shall have the signatures of both the custodian and President, or his/her designee. The guardian shall receive a copy of the discharge forms.
4. The Epworth staff shall complete a discharge packet for each placement, which shall include (a) discharge summary, (b) medications release form, (c) records and (d) clothing inventory. These items may be available at the time of discharge or sent to the custodian within ten (10) days of discharge. The discharge summary shall include the reason(s) for placement and for discharge, the outcome of the placement, services rendered, aftercare plan, if any, and recommendations

## **Procedures for Emergency Care in the Event of a Placement Disruption**

During the course of placement, a resident may become disruptive. Measures are then taken to provide short term care until a suitable plan can be formulated. The following procedures are used in case of a disruption in placement:

1. The legal guardian will be notified of any behaviors or incidents requiring removal of a resident from their respective cottage or that may otherwise compromise the placement.
2. If a resident is threatening to harm self, staff will:
  - a. Call 911 if severe injury has occurred or threat is present
  - b. Call the On-Call Supervisor immediately at 803-331-1242
  - c. Remain with the resident, never leaving that person alone
  - d. An assessment of the situation will be made by a team that may include the Nurse, Chief Program Officer, Coordinator of Social Services and the Coordinator of Residential Services. If the need for psychiatric hospitalization is warranted, arrangements will be made through the Health Center or the Social Services Center with the physician on-call. The resident will be supervised at all times by staff while transportation to the hospital is arranged.
3. If a resident's behavior is beyond the scope of management within a group home setting, the legal guardian may be asked to remove the resident from the campus until Epworth's Administrative Review Committee (ARC) can recommend a course of action that is in the child's best interests.
4. The Health Center may be used for supervision and housing up to 48 hours in cases where the resident is deemed too disruptive to be maintained in the cottage but the situation does not warrant hospitalization or immediate removal from campus.
5. If a decision is made to discharge the resident, the Health Center may be used for the above stated period of time, if supervision is available, until arrangements can be made for the guardian to discharge the resident. The Coordinator of Intake Services will provide the guardian with a list of potential referral sources for alternative placement.

## ***Client Rights and Responsibilities***

### ***What does Epworth ask of the family?***

We want the family to be **actively involved**. We strongly believe a child needs to be connected to his or her family. Research shows that the more involved a family is with children in placement, the more successful the placement. Family involvement means:

- Regular contact with residents by phone and through visitation.
- Family participation in planning goals for the placement as well as attending regular family meetings with staff to access progress.
- Participation in family counseling if selected to be involved in the University of South Carolina's satellite-training center for counselors at Epworth. This service is provided without charge.
- Working together to help the child comply with safety rules and meet program expectations, including the development of productive behaviors and life skill competencies.

We ask that the family **pay for services**. We provide interventions designed to assist families as they work out their difficulties. Payment for services is one way we know that you value the efforts made for your family, and demonstrates your desire to continue to be involved with your child. Payment arrangements and fees will be made at the time of admission. If it becomes necessary for you to change these arrangements for any reason, you should contact our Accounting Manager. You are expected to honor all agreements made with Epworth concerning finances.

We ask that the family **share information** with Epworth staff. We can only serve the child and family if we have a good understanding of the issues affecting the family and contributing to the need for out-of-home placement. The sharing of information starts with the application process and continues through phone conferences, quarterly progress reviews, and meetings. We also ask that the family keep us informed of any changes that may have an impact on the child's behavior or placement.

### ***How can the parents/guardians continue to be involved in the child's schooling?***

We will send home report cards so you can encourage school progress. The Chief Academic Officer is willing to assist you in any way possible. If you would like to visit the school or talk with school personnel concerning your child, please contact the Epworth Education Office at **(803) 312-8878**.

### ***What about medications?***

Epworth will give medications prescribed by a medical doctor. If we think your child needs to be seen by a doctor to be evaluated for medication, you will be notified prior to the evaluation. Should a psychotropic medication be prescribed or discontinued, you will be contacted prior to the beginning or discontinuing of such a medication for your child. If you have a question or concern about medication, you may contact the Case Manager and request a consultation with the prescribing doctor. If a child is admitted with standing orders from a doctor for a chronic condition, the prescribed medical regimen will be followed pending further medical evaluation.

As with other services offered by Epworth, you and/or your child have the right to refuse to take medication. If medication or other services are refused, we will discuss with you and the child why the services or medications are considered necessary. If the physician and staff believe medication is necessary for the placement to be successful, we may elect to assist you in locating an alternative placement.

### ***How does Epworth Children's Home support a child in crisis?***

Epworth child care staff are trained annually in Non-Violent Crisis Intervention (NCI). Staff learn how to pro-actively recognize the signs of a child in crisis and how to respond professionally. Additional support staff are available to guide and re-assure the child. We do not place hands on a child in crisis. In fact, we physically intervene as a last resort only when a child's behavior is a danger of harm to self or to others.

### ***What happens when my child leaves Epworth?***

Children leave Epworth for different reasons. Most discharges are according to plan. Basically, this means that a child and family have accomplished the goals set during placement and are ready to reunite. Some discharges are not according to plan. These types of discharges may occur when a child needs a higher level of care, the parent or guardian may wish to end the placement, or the child's behavior has become persistently disruptive to the cottage environment.

### ***How can we work together in the best interests of the child?***

We want your experience with Epworth Children's Home to be both helpful and productive. To accomplish this we must work together. We ask you to abide by these guidelines:

1. Epworth Children's Home is a **SMOKE FREE CAMPUS**. Please refrain from any tobacco use while you are on campus.
2. Communication with your child is important but phone calls can be disruptive to campus life.
  - Keep phone calls short and during appropriate times of day. If it is not a good time to talk or you get the cottage answering machine, staff will return your call or inform you of a better time to call when your child can talk. Longer calls can be arranged through cottage staff.
  - Calls and mail will be monitored **ONLY** as required by Court Orders or if situations arise that Epworth staff determine care in the best interests of the child. If non court ordered phone or mail monitoring is done you will be informed. Packages are always opened by the child with staff present to assure safety of all the children in our care.
3. Children are busy on our campus. Please make arrangements for visits or pick up with cottage staff.
  - Please keep to the scheduled visits and pick up times and contact us if your plans change.
  - Worship is expected at Epworth Children's Home. Pick up or visits should be before or after scheduled worship on campus. You are welcome to attend worship services with your child.
  - Visitation is only with those persons listed on the Approved Visitation List completed at admission. Changes to the Approved Visitation List can be made throughout the child's stay with us. **NO ONE** will be allowed to visit or pick up if they are not approved by the guardian. Court ordered contact is strictly enforced so please abide by court rulings.
4. Privacy is given to all children and families to the fullest extent possible by Epworth Children's Home.
  - We respect the privacy of your child's room and knock before entering. We do not search your child's room or belongings without them being present.
  - Pictures and participation in both research and scholarly projects is sometimes a part of Epworth life. Your permission is required and you have the right to refuse. We also ask that you take no pictures or videos while on campus to protect the privacy of all our children.

5. Your child will have a plan of care while they are with us. Your participation is expected in this process. You will be invited to attend a quarterly progress meeting (every 90 days) to review your child's care goals, discharge plan, and progress in our program. You will receive a written copy of this review.
6. We are constantly working to evaluate our services and to improve. Concerns are addressed either to the Coordinator of Residential Services or the Coordinator of Social Services. A formal grievance can be submitted in writing to the Chief Program Officer who will assist you with our grievance process. If the Chief Program Officer is not able to satisfy your concern, the matter can be appealed in writing to the President of Epworth Children's Home.

## ***Discipline at Epworth Children's Home***

Epworth's philosophy of child care is summarized by six key principles:

- Developmentally Focused
- Family Involved
- Relationship Based
- Competence Centered
- Trauma Informed
- Ecologically Oriented

(*CARE* Curriculum, Residential Child Care Project, Cornell University)

All decisions that impact children and families served at Epworth are grounded in these core beliefs, including the approach to discipline. In most settings, discipline typically refers to actions taken when a child breaks a rule or fails to meet a requirement or expectation. Within Epworth's child care model, the failure of a child to obey a rule or meet an expectation is seen first and foremost as an opportunity to more completely understand the child and then to teach rather than punish. ***How does this approach work?***

### ***The Establishment of Cottage Rules & Expectations***

#### A Rule about Rules

Rules, like routines, should provide a predictable structure that establishes boundaries and minimal expectations for behavior. There should be a **limited number of rules** and they should focus on **providing a sense of safety and security** for the residents and staff. The more rules a program has, the more the care worker becomes an enforcer of rules rather than a person to support, encourage, and teach the young people.

The involvement of residents in establishing rules that relate to the safety and security of their environment is expected. Each cottage team, staff and residents, should establish a set of "rules" that meet these criteria and reflect the development stage and needs of their residents. These should be printed and placed in a public area within the cottage, and made available to custodians as needed.

#### Setting Expectations

Expectations are basic life skills that are essential for children to mature. Performing appropriate chores, doing homework, communicating respectfully with others, and practicing good hygiene are a few examples of core skills.

Therefore, setting and maintaining realistic expectations for children and young people becomes an important part of the developmental process. High expectation messages given by caring adults help children see themselves as "capable, competent" human beings.

When an expectation is not met within Epworth's approach to child care, it does not automatically become an issue of noncompliance, but a challenge for the care worker to help the child meet the expectation. This helps avoid power struggles and shifts the emphasis from who is in charge to how to help the child learn new competencies. **Dr. Ross Greene states that "Children do well if they can. If they can't, we need to figure out why so we can help."**

## ***Discipline and the Teaching of Self Management Skills***

### Introduction

So, what process do Epworth staff members follow when a child doesn't obey a rule or meet an expectation? This process is found in detail in the *CARE* curriculum manual, pp. S81-S95. This manual is available in each cottage and is the text for training all direct care workers at Epworth.

The emphasis in *CARE* is upon options that will help children meet expectations and follow rules, rather than using an external reward and punishment system. If the care worker's response is to assign consequences when an expectation is not met or a rule broken, the focus becomes, "How to get the child to comply with the consequence instead of how to meet the expectation or follow the rule." **Teaching self management and facilitating behavior change via the CARE process is the goal when faced with behavioral challenges.** The response options are as follows:

#### **Teach the Child/Youth**

1. When the care worker and child are both calm enough to discuss the problem without escalating the situation
2. When the child does not have the necessary cognitive and emotional skills to meet the expectation consistently

#### **Change/Adjust the Expectation**

1. When it is an unrealistic expectation at that time that the child cannot do
2. When there is no immediate danger in changing or dropping the expectation
3. When by adjusting the expectation the child will be able to succeed

#### **Encourage the Child/Youth to Meet the Expectation**

1. When the expectation/rule is important enough to risk escalating the situation
2. When the child has demonstrated the ability to meet the expectation on a regular basis
3. When the child is calm enough to attend to and respond to the request

#### **When to Use Consequences**

1. When the child already knows the skill but does not use it
2. When the child can remember the consequence
3. When the child is motivated by the consequence

Using such a principle-based approach to child care and discipline requires that staff place a priority upon building relationships with residents, *responding* thoughtfully and creatively to situations rather than *reacting*, and becoming teachers rather than jailors.

### Prohibitions

The following actions are considered "punishments" that are cruel, inhumane, and inappropriate, and are prohibited at Epworth:

- Dehumanizing, degrading acts such as head shaving
- Depriving food, family visits, or mail
- Slapping, shaking, or use of handcuffs
- Threatening to remove from the facility as a punishment
- Disciplining a child for a medical or psychological problem over which they have no control, such as bedwetting, stuttering, etc.
- Denying communication and visits with family members
- Demeaning acts designed to embarrass children; verbal abuse
- Denying essential program services, shelter, clothing, personal needs
- Excessive physical exercise or work tasks

Corporal punishment is not used at Epworth. Any form of isolation or time out for a child in danger of harming themselves is forbidden, as well as the use of isolation as a means of coercion, discipline, convenience, or retaliation. Epworth does not use isolation/seclusion rooms or chemical restraints.

Physical restraint of a resident is only to be used as a last resort when less intrusive interventions have failed or are inappropriate and when the resident poses a significant threat of harm to himself/herself or others. The child's physical, medical, and emotional state must be carefully considered prior to restraint. Only Epworth staff who are currently certified in Non-violent Crisis Intervention (NCI) may restrain a child. Such restraints must be discontinued as soon as the child demonstrates compliance or is no longer deemed dangerous.

### Reporting

*Critical Incident Reports* are completed by staff and guardians are notified whenever a major incident occurs, such as running away, school suspension, aggression toward others, a medical emergency, or threat of harm requiring physical restraint. These *Reports* are placed in the resident's record. For further information or clarification, consult your immediate supervisor and/or the *CARE* training manual.

***VISITATION POLICY***

Children in the care of Epworth Children's Home will not be released to anyone who cannot safely care for the child or children.

Epworth will deny off-campus visitation if the driver of the vehicle transporting the child or children does not have a valid driver's license and/or is under the age of 21. The visitation can be denied if there is suspicion of drug, alcohol, or other substance use by any person in the transporting vehicle. No person who is suspected of being under the influence of such a substance will be allowed to operate a vehicle on the Epworth campus.

(Visitation Policy Revised and Adopted by the Epworth Board of Trustees on 11/17/05)

**\*\*PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING VISITATION PROCEDURES:**

Children are allowed contact and visits with individuals on their "Approved Visitation List", which is to be completed at the time of admission by the parent or legal guardian. Questions about additions to or deletions from this list should be directed to the child's Case Manager. Arrangements for visitation are to be made with the Case Manager or Cottage Coordinator. Children are to be picked up for visitation from the cottages. This includes both on and off campus visitation. Any alternate arrangements for pick up or drop off to include time should be scheduled through the child's Case Manager.